Pentatonic Pathways

BY ANDRÉ BUSH

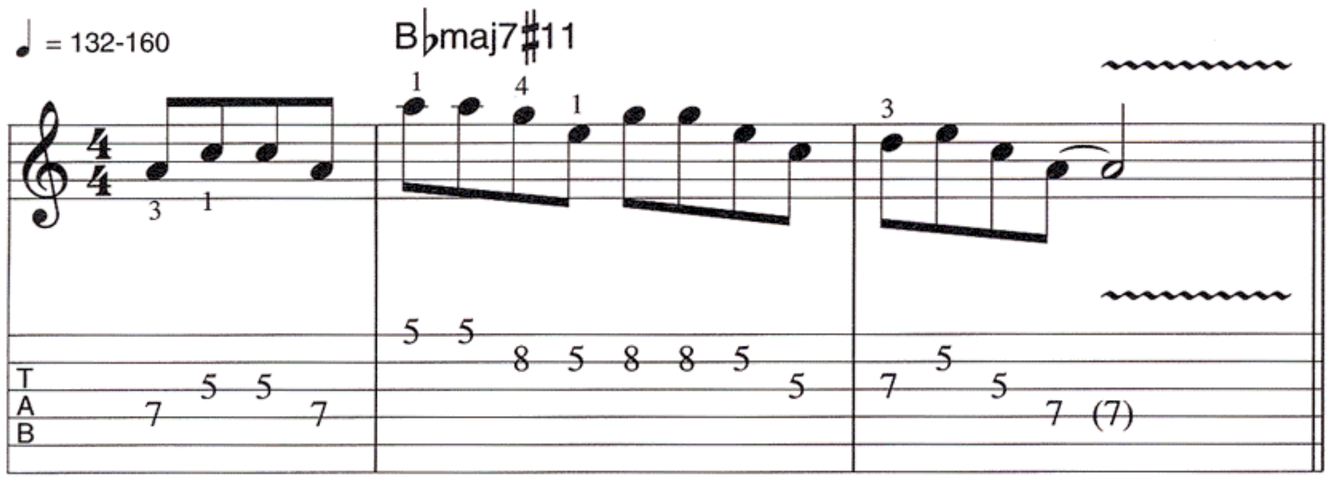
WHILE THE LYDIAN MODE (1, 2, 3, ♯4, 5, 6, 7) is the scale most commonly used to improvise over maj7♯11 chords, the major pentatonic scale (1, 2, 3, 5, 6) offers a sophisticated, easy-to-play alternative to Lydian. The trick is to use the major pentatonic scale a whole-step above the root of your target chord. For example, to solo on a *Cmaj7♯11* chord, use the *D* major pentatonic scale (*D, E, F♯, A, B*). In terms of our target chord, *Cmaj7♯11*, this gives us the 2 (or 9), 3, ♯11, 6 (or 13), and 7. The hip-tones-to-effort ratio here is hard to beat, and—as you've probably already got a few pentatonic licks in your vocabulary—this method of superimposing pentatonics a whole-step above maj7♯11 chords allows you to use licks you already know in more sophisticated harmonic and melodic ways.

Ex. 1 shows how we might use a *C* major pentatonic scale over *B♭maj7♯11*, with a phrase reminiscent of '60s soul-jazzers such as Grant Green or Kenny Burrell.

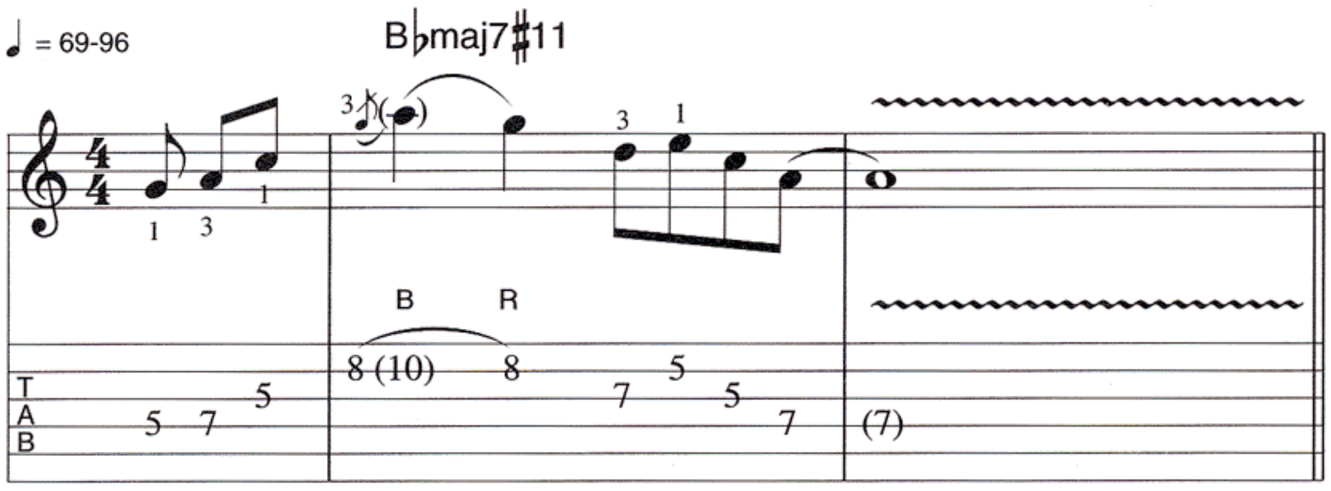
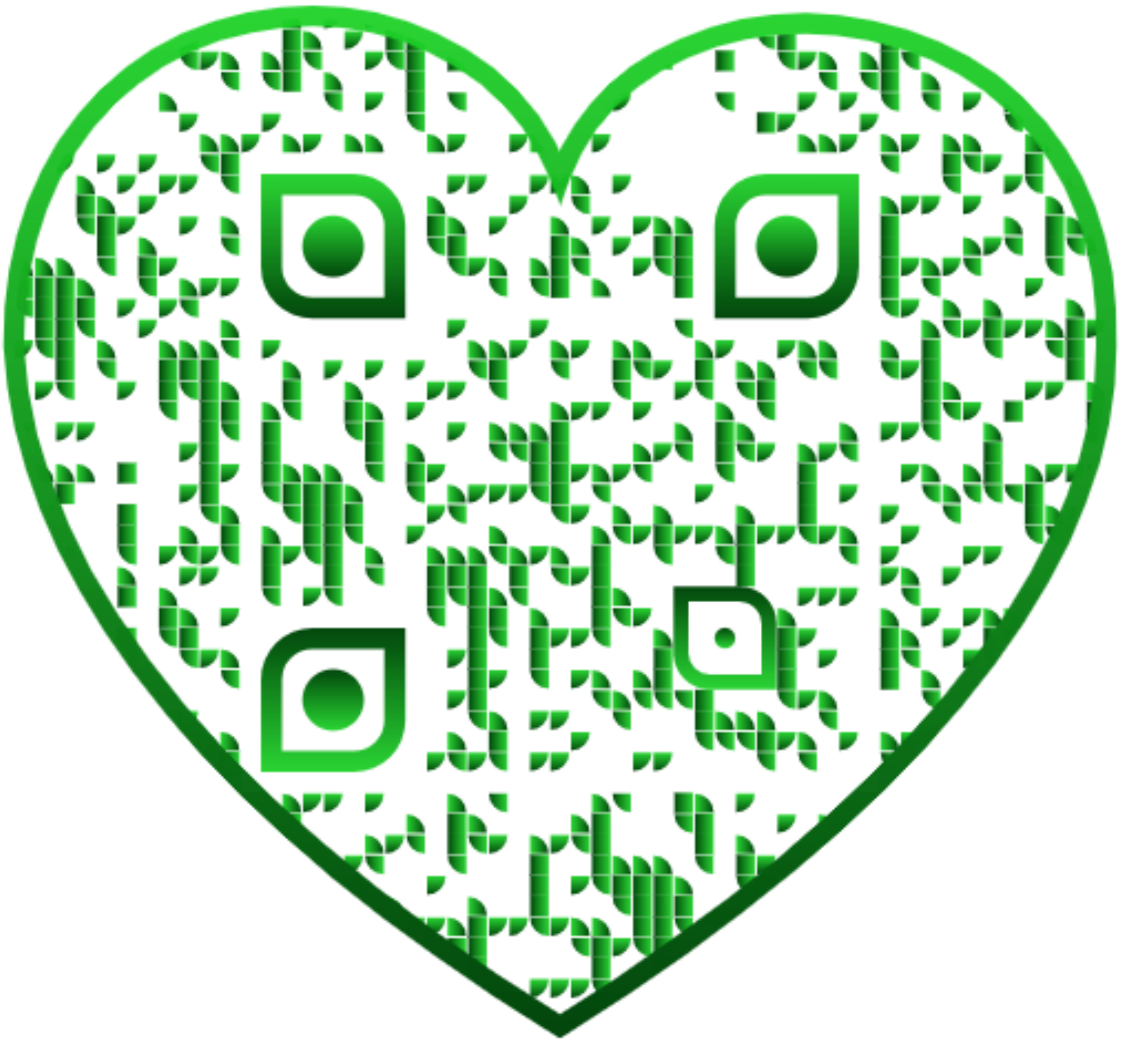
Ex. 2 takes us into more modern jazz territory, again using familiar blues phraseology in a new harmonic setting. As the example illustrates, the well-worn major pentatonic scale can sound remarkably fresh in this context—like something you might hear John Scofield or Larry Carlton play.

There are many more ways to use major pentatonic scales in place of other scales or modes. To probe some of the possibilities, try laying down a simple one-chord (major-7th, minor-7th, or dominant-7th) vamp on tape; then jam along with your prerecorded vamp, trying different pentatonics and seeing which ones sound best to your ears.

Ex. 1



Ex. 2



San Francisco-based jazz/rock guitarist André Bush has performed or recorded with Steve Smith, Paul McCandless, and Charlie Haden, and has taught throughout the U.S. and Europe as a guitar clinician. His second album, *Invisible City* [Quicksilver] was named CD of the Year by jazzreview.com. For more information, go to andrebush.com.